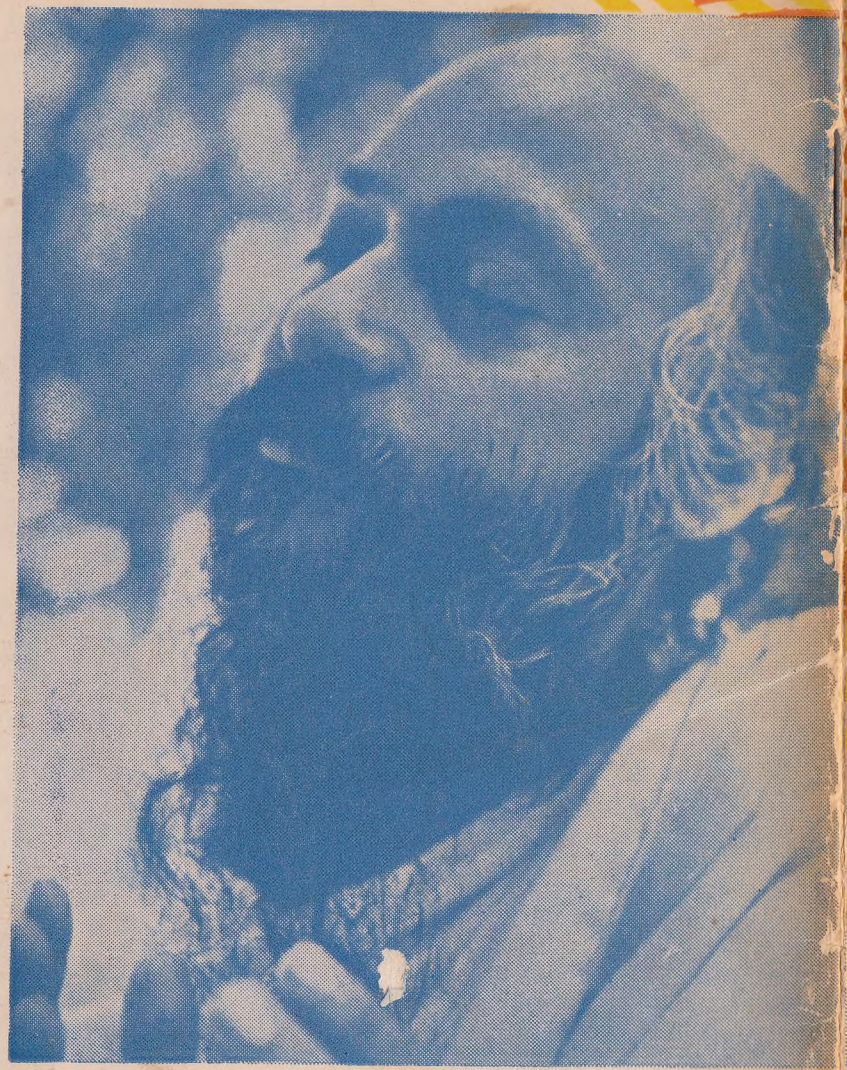

NATH VAIRAG

LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

ma yoga kranti

Lead Kindly Light

Some Enlighted Moments with
Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

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Lead Kindly Light

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The night was pitch dark. Though we were sitting in silence, even that silence was a joyful experience in presence of Acharyashri. So often we have found that even silence becomes eloquent in his presence.

On that moonless night, when we asked him about this our experience, he said, "Words are impotent to express Truth. Truth can be expressed only in silence. The moment we enter silence, the mystery of Truth is revealed. **Man's misfortune is that he has forgotten to be silent; and therefore his entire relationship with Nature has been vitiated. Nature knows only the language of silence. He who knows not that language, ipso facto, loses touch with Nature. And mankind's misery is due to man's distance from nature.**"

Saying this, he was silent again, and with him we also lapsed into 'mauna' (silence). There was no sound outside, but for the rustling of leaves on the trees, and the chorus of chirping insects. The experience was of full awareness combined with complete silence; and in that silence, we felt like something within us was disintegrating. The silence seemed to wipe out ever so gently what is known as ego.

Then he spoke again. "Only with the dissolution of ego, we can enter silence. When ego — alias 'I' — is dissolved, there is possibility of communion and integration with Nature."

Somebody asked, "But how to achieve this silence?"

"Just be silent," Acharyashri said. "It is not a matter of procedure or planning. **See with your eyes and hear with your ears the sights and sounds around you; do this with full consciousness, but without any reaction to these sights and sounds. Silence will be spontaneous if there is full awareness of, but no reaction to, the external stimuli.**"

"Silence does not mean non-use of the faculty of speech. **The basis of silence is not the throat, but the thought. The root and centre of silence is in the mind and not in the vocal apparatus. You may be silent without, but verbose within; and then you are not silent.** On the other hand, even if you are loquacious, but without thoughts which overwhelm your mind — so that you are silent within — then you are truly silent."

"It is like this: supposing you decide to fast; you may successfully abstain from food; but you are not truly fasting if you keep thinking about food all the time. But there may be another person who may eat without indulgence and eat consciously; in reality, though not apparently, he is fasting. What matters ultimately and always is the man within, and not his actions."

These words shaped for us a basic concept in Acharyashri's philosophy of life. To him, **"what matters ultimately and always is the man within, and not his actions."** Neither the change of apparel, nor the change in mode of living, matter at all to him. His emphasis has always been on the transformation of our innermost thoughts and feelings. All the various religious systems have been corroded by the outward and customary rites and rituals. In these worthless formalities, the essential Truth is lost sight of, and we are left holding the cold ashes instead of being warmed by the fire of life which religion provides.

Somebody had brought flowers for Acharyashri; beautiful flowers they were, and Acharyashri seemed lost in admiring them. "The flowers are beautiful," he said, "but your plucking them was not a beautiful act. For whom Beauty is equivalent to Love, it is impossible to sever the flowers from their plants. The plucking of flowers hastens their death; and nothing is uglier than taking life, even of a flower. **Non-violence is the acme of beauty; violence is the nadir of ugliness.**"

Before he could continue, someone quipped, "But we like flowers; that is why we pluck them!"

To this, Acharyashri said, "Love is opposed to the act of plucking flowers. Love and plucking of flowers can not co-exist. Plucking is not symbolic of love, but of cruelty. It is symbolic of our authoritarian nature; we want to possess whatever seems beautiful, regardless of the possibility of destroying that object of beauty. This is true not only of flower-plucking, but of all our dealings in life, and of all our human relationships. We practise the same cruelty with even the human beings whom we profess to love. For example, even with the beloved, a lover

seeks to enforce authority. We all seek to pluck the human flower, and in the process, rob that flower of the sap of life, leading to its premature wilting."

After his usual silent reflection he continued:

"Where there is love, there is no possessiveness or bondage; and bondage separates one person from the other. Love is what unites and not what separates; Love is what protects, not what destroys life; Love is what frees, not what enslaves. If you love flowers, you give yourself to flowers; you do not try to own them by plucking. Love knows only giving; it knows not the language of receiving — to say nothing of the language of robbing. And please note that this is an axiom applicable to all aspects of life. Those who know not this truth, look upon their cruelty and violence as a form of love. Though they do not realise it, their hatred lies latent in their so-called love. And where they lay claim to a sense of beauty, their outward aesthetics is just a cloak hiding crass ugliness."

When he stopped speaking, we were lost in contemplation of Acharyashri's words; he had touched some sore spots in our hearts.

After a while, he said, "Do not think; do not brood. Just watch. Thoughts lead you away from the Truth. Thinking is a device to escape from yourself. It will be better if you observe within yourself the truth of what I say. Open out in love, and make your own discoveries; they may corroborate mine."

The other day a Pandit came to see Acharyashri. He has often come here. He is a learned man who has mastered a number of scriptures, and can speak with erudition on Atma and Parmatma. Chiding him for his constant preoccupation with Godly matters, Acharyashri asked him to refrain from any kind of thinking, because thinking — even about God — was of no use. After all, what was the use of thinking and arguing? **Whether you argued with others or whether you argued with yourself, it was all futile. Words uttered or unexpressed, were never meant to convey the Truth.** The Truth had to be sought out with the help of totality of life that was lived, and not with mere words.

Nevertheless, the Pandit preferred to enter into discussion with Acharyashri. Acharyashri narrated to him a story.

"Once upon a time, in an emperor's court, a poet came to recite his compositions; these were in praise of the emperor. The words of the songs, as well as the voice of the singer enchanted the emperor, who announced a gift of five thousand gold coins to the poet. The gift was to be presented the next day. The poet who was a poor man living in a small hut, returned home overjoyed on being a successful bard. The thought of five thousand gold coins did not allow him to sleep. During the night, he kept planning and re-planning how he would spend the windfall; and this kept him tossing in bed till the dawn.

"In the morning he presented himself before the emperor. The emperor greeted him and inquired, 'What brings you here, Oh poet? What do you want?' The poet was confused; he queried anxiously, 'Your Majesty! Have you already forgotten that only yesterday you had announced a gift of five thousand

gold coins in appreciation of my poems?' The emperor said, 'You are a silly simpleton. You had pleased me by your words; so I thought it proper to please you with my words. The give and take is over!' "

Acharyashri ended the story with a laugh, and elucidated his point: "In our relationship with God also, this is true. Results are achieved neither by thoughts nor by words nor by plans, but by the life lived. In living lies the reward."

With Acharyashri we were on a long train journey. There were many other passengers besides our group. It was interesting to note that each passenger readied himself to alight, much before he reached his destination. Commenting on this common practice of us all, Acharyashri said, "How alert we remain in an ordinary train journey! And how we lack totally this alacrity in the important journey of life! We neither know our destination, nor are we prepared to alight. When death comes to rob us of life, we are caught unawares. And then, belatedly, we realise that we had forgotten about death; we had forgotten to prepare ourselves for dying."

Someone questioned, "What do you mean by this alertness and preparedness?"

Acharyashri replied, "First thing to bear in mind is that life is a journey. We begin at one point and move on to some other point. We are not perfect, but we have to strive to be perfect. For the perfect, there is no travel and no destination. But, for the majority of us, who are far from being perfect, the journey, the quest, the search, — call it what you will — is essential. When we feel that life is a journey, it is a sign of

imperfection. But this feeling is important. Concentrate on this imperfection; see the limitation; or at least have a glimpse of your incomplete state. He who realises he is imperfect, will be filled with ambition to be perfect; just as he who is ill and ailing wishes fervently to be well; or just as he who enters a dark room, instinctively thinks of switching on the light."

Someone intervened to express his doubt: "Even if the realisation of our imperfection dawns upon us, what good does it do?"

To him Acharyashri said, "When you feel thirsty, what do you do? Does not the thirst rouse you to search for water? Similarly, the realisation of one's imperfect state rouses one to seek for perfection. Then life's goal is sighted, and one begins to move towards that goal."

"Whereas meaningful life is a yoga, aimless life is a 'bhoga' or an indulgence. The life of 'bhoga' is like a lake which has stagnant water, which flows nowhere, and which, in time, dries up. But the life of yoga is like a river, which, for ever is rushing towards the ocean. To you I suggest: Be like the river that moves towards the ocean. Only then you will find life worthwhile. The lake exists in its narrow confines; it travels not. It has nowhere to go, and nothing to become. On the other hand, the river is not confined; it is expansive; it likes to move and flow, because it aims to be the ocean. It is not satisfied with being a river; it aims at being a vast, limitless body of water. When a man realises his inadequate condition, he also becomes ambitious like a river. Therefore, it is a fortunate thing to be dissatisfied with imperfection; this dissatisfaction is the first step towards the goal of perfection."

The sun had just arisen; with Acharyashri we were sitting on the river bank. Some fishermen were casting their nets; some of the fish already caught were lying on the sands, in the throes of death. Acharyashri said, "Like fish out of water, man also gasps for breath when he is not in his divine element."

After a while, we got up to go home; on our way back, someone asked Acharyashri, "What is the cause of our miseries?"

Acharyashri explained, "Don't say miseries; say 'misery', since there is only one misery, i.e. isolation from God. We are not aware of this fact; surrounded by a multitude of miseries we forget the original misery. The one root misery creates the illusion of a number of miseries. We have to be radical, and deal with this root misery. If a tree is to be destroyed completely, one does not cut a branch here and a branch there, but either uproots the tree, if that is possible, or cuts the main trunk near the roots. Similarly, we have to destroy the root of all miseries."

After we had walked some distance, he spoke again, "We certainly are like fish out of water, — like the fish we saw dying on the sands. We can well imagine those around us and even ourselves as the dying fish on a river bank."

Saying this he was silent again; but after walking a few steps in contemplation, he started speaking: "Come to think of it, man is both the fish that is dying on the sands, as also the fisherman who casts his net in the river. Man is both the fisherman and his catch. **Man has himself to blame for his bondage and unhappiness. But in this very fact of he himself being the cause of his miseries lies the hope and**

possibility of his freedom and happiness. It is all upto him. The day he decides, he can be reunited with his Creator. It is simply a matter of resolution; what appears far, can be quite near. Man's freedom lies buried just underneath his seeming thralldom."

How deep is the despondency of some of us who think that without the grace of God — or at least a guru — we cannot hope to realise the Self! We believe that by ourselves, we are impotent, ignorant and what not! Once someone expressed this his dejection to Acharyashri. Acharyashri laughed and told him a story.

"Once, in a prolonged warfare, a king was given the news that he had lost a battle. Naturally, his disappointment was abysmal. He almost fainted on hearing this sad news. When he recovered, he felt depressed and gloomy; his palace and possessions suddenly lost all charm for him. The queen tried to console him, but the king kept mumbling, 'My army has been defeated; I have lost all my artillery,' so on and so forth. The queen in trying to assuage him said, 'My sir ! I have known about all this. But I have even worse news to give you!' The king stopped his soliloquy, and asked in amazement, 'Worse than this news! What can be worse than this news!' The queen said, 'You have lost a battle, but you can still win the war. What worries me is not the loss of your army, but the loss of your courage. And that is by far a worse loss. The loss of hope, enthusiasm and courage spells a sure doom, whereas the loss of military power is comparatively nothing. The future is bleak for him who is hopeless. Take heart, therefore, my lord!'

"The queen's words were not meant for the king only; they apply to us all. **Instead of taking things to heart, we have to learn to take heart. We have to overcome depression and defeatism and despondency; for he who loses hope has no future ahead of him.**"

The sun was about to take a plunge in the western seas. Acharyashri was engrossed in watching the beauty of sunset. His eyes were full of compassion when he remarked, 'Like the sun disappearing in the sea, religion too is gradually disappearing from our midst these days. And that is the basis of all the woes of mankind."

After a pause, he continued as though in revery:

"The waning of religion is due to lack of unity amongst divergent faiths. The forces of religion and all that is good in life are very much scattered. That is why religion seems to suffer defeat at the hands of its opponents; and mankind is the loser by this defeat. This state of affairs cannot last for ever. Now is the time in the history of mankind, when, if the forces of good and truth do not bury their differences and unite, we shall perish. The decisive battle against forces of evil can be fought and won only by complete unity of all the forces for good."

Acharyashri's words appealed to our hearts; there seemed nothing but truth in them. It does not enhance human dignity to create friction between faiths — and that too in the name of religion! There should be no conflict amongst various faiths; but, come to think of it, the world history of faiths is full of

strifes and wars. Not only that, even in one and the same faith, the various sects malign one another and quarrel amongst themselves! Why?

We asked Acharyashri to explain these discords. He said, "Ego is the root of all evil. There can not, and need not, be any friction between faiths. The differences lie only in the egoism of so-called followers of faiths. It is ego that is militant. And it is ego that creates frictions and factions even amongst followers of one and the same faith. Actually, not only in religious matters, but in all spheres of life, the underlying cause of conflict and disharmony is ego; and the solution to these fissiparous tendencies is dissolution of ego; because love — which is the opposite of ego — creates a common meeting ground for divergent groups of human beings."

"Ego is irreligion. Religion is not the cause of quarrels or battles or so-called holy crusades; these are caused by the lack of religion in the so-called followers of religion. And this will continue to be the state of affairs so long as religion is predetermined at birth, and has nothing to do with the life lived. **The trouble is that without having to be religious, people inherit a readymade religion. History of mankind would not have been so gory if religion were not familial or hereditary by birth. Those for whom religion is not a living experience create chasms between the various faiths.** No faith is ever harmed by irreligious people outside its folds so much, as by people within it. The harm comes from the inner group that is irreligious. The ignorant believe that the danger to faith is from outside the group, whereas, in reality, the risk is always from within. People mistakenly try to safe-

guard their religion from outside assault, completely disregarding the risk from within. It is my observation that there are no enemies of any faith outside that faith; faiths are destroyed by the foes within the fold. These inside groups do not consider religion a way to self-realisation, but as an association or alliance, which can be given a distinct social or political colour. And, unfortunately, if they succeed in creating a distinct association, religion fails; yes, sad but true it is, that if they succeed, religion fails. And the reason of this failure is simple; it is that **religion is not an association."**

"All associations are in opposition to somebody or something; the life-force of all groupism is hatred of other groups; without opposition and acrimony, groups can neither exist nor function. **Religion implies self-realisation; religion is the science whereby one's life can be bettered. Religion, in reality, has nothing to do with any group or society; it is concerned only with the individual.** Therefore, the various religions — better to call them faiths as we have done so far — are in opposition to one another, only when viewed as separate groups; but the same faiths, if they are understood to be the diverse ways of self-realisation, are found to be paths converging towards the same Truth."

A new-comer to our group interrupted to ask, "Do you consider all faiths same and equal?"

With a snigger, Acharyashri remarked, "There is only one religion, because there is only one Truth. But the paths to that one Truth, that peak experience, can be several. In fact, there are as many paths as there are seekers of Truth. Each individual has to create his own path, because there are none already laid

out. The individual has to start from where he is. Others can not be expected to start from the same place, simply because others are not in the same place. The starting points are all different, but the destination is the same. The starting points are different because the mental make-up is different in us all; the destination is the same because religion is one, and only one. The diversity in faiths can not be laid at the door of religion because the diversity belongs to the individuals; sects are born of this diversity. There are factions called sects because of individual diversity, and not because the Truth is diverse. It should be noted, however, that the diversity does not imply conflict. The paths to the same goal can be different, but that is no reason why they should be considered at cross-purpose to one another. In fact, since they lead to the same destination, they should be considered companionate. Immense good can accrue to us all if, with the above understanding, the various religious sects fraternise."

Gradually it was getting dark, and the firmament was now twinkling with stars. Acharyashri remarked as we got up to go home, "Just as the stars are all different, but the light they give us is the same; so also, the sects are numerous, but the religion there-in is the same."

As Acharyashri was basking in the early morning sun after his bath, a group of visitors approached him. One of them inquired: "How should life be lived?"

Pondering the question for a while, Acharyashri replied, **"Life is to be lived as if it were a mirror. Welcome everybody and every thing, but hold on to nothing. That life**

is pure in which the mind does not cling to influences and impressions. Let bygones be bygones; and worry not for what is yet to come. This is the path of 'sadhna', wherein the individual associates himself with the present, and his what is yet to come. This is the path of 'sadhna', wherein roots are anchored firmly in his true being. The past and the future are the domains of the mind; he who is engrossed in, or engulfed by, the past and the future, can not know life. Life is, alter all, here and now; not there and then. He who seeks life not in 'here and now' is wasting time."

Even as Acharyashri was speaking thus, a strong breeze suddenly swayed the branches of a tree opposite us; the birds in the tree panicked and flew away. Noticing this, Acharyashri remarked, "Like trees, be rooted in the same place, be steady. But live like birds in the pure present. The door to the Truth opens by living naturally and innocently."

It had rained heavily, but now the clouds had dispersed, and the sun was shining bright. The sun's rays washed by the rains, were pleasant to bask in. Only a while ago, when we were out in the garden, a big rainbow had adorned the sky.

Referring to the rainbow, Acharyashri said, **"This world, this body, this mind, all are like the rainbow, beautiful but unreal. Know their beauty, but also know their ephemeral quality; and then these three — the world, the body and the mind — will not enslave you. Unfortunately, we do not separate the lasting from the transitory, and the reality from the dream. Whilst we are dreaming, we feel dreams are real."**

Hearing his reference to dreams, I was reminded of a question I had often asked myself without getting a satisfactory reply; I put it to Acharyashri. "During sleep, is it possible to bear in mind that what we see is merely a dream?"

He said, "Yes; it is possible. If in your waking state, you bear in mind that whatever you see is as unreal as a dream, gradually in your sleeping state also, you will know dreams to be dreams. **It is only because we do not consider the world in our waking state to be a dream, that we feel dreams in our sleeping state to be real.** Our mental attitude during the waking hours is carried on into the sleeping stage also."

This set me thinking. Whatever Acharyashri said was always thought-provoking, and based on experience and close observation.

Where we were sitting with Acharyashri on that dark night, the atmosphere was of silence. We were in a small temple of a small village. Inside the temple was a small lamp; the incense burning in a fire nearby spread its sweet fragrance all around.

One of us put a question to Acharyashri, "Is it necessary to make someone a guru in our quest for knowledge?"

Acharyashri replied, **"Do not make only one person a guru; make everyone a guru. If you care to move about with wide-open eyes, and are willing to learn with an open and relaxed mind, you discover that the whole world is a guru."**

Absorbing the tranquillity of night with a pause, Acharyashri continued:

"You may have heard the name of Saint Maluk. He has noted about how ashamed he had to feel before three persons: an alcoholic, a small child, and a woman madly in love with a man. The saint has called all three his gurus. How so, is interesting to know. Once Maluk saw a drunk on a road, walking with unsteady gait. Maluk told him, 'Friend! Steady yourself, lest you should fall.' The drunk laughed loudly and said, 'Brother! Why don't you steady yourself? If I fall and dirty my clothes, I shall be able to wash them clean; but if you fall, your purification will be quite a job!' Maluk was aghast at these words of wisdom from a drunken sot!"

"Another time, Maluk met a child with a lighted wick-lamp in his hand. Maluk asked the child, 'Where did you get this lamp?' No sooner had Maluk said this, than a gust of wind extinguished the lamp. The child said, 'Now you tell me first where the light is gone, then I shall tell you whence I got the lamp.' For Maluk the child was another guru."

"In the third episode, once when Maluk was on the outskirts of a town, a young girl came running to him, searching for her lost lover, and inquiring about his whereabouts. Her clothes were in disarray, and she was not aware of her partially exposed body. Seeing her in this condition, Maluk remarked, 'First dress properly; then approach me and have your say.' The girl said, 'Brother! Being intoxicated by the love of a God-made creature, I lost awareness of my body and my dress; if you had not drawn my attention, I would have run to the bazar in this semi-nude condition; thanks for bringing me to my senses. But is not it surprising that even though you are supposed to be intoxicated by God's love, you are conscious of my body and

my garments? Can he who is lost in God, notice clothes or lack of them?' Maluk felt like he had been awakened out of his sleep. He realised how impossible it is to gain divine knowledge if one keeps noticing insignificant trifles."

The summer moon rose full and bright as we sat surrounding Acharyashri on the sands on the beach. Playfully, we were drawing figures on the sands. Observing this, Acharyashri remarked, "So many of us waste our lives drawing ciphers on the sands."

We stopped doodling to listen to him. He continued with a smile, "None heeds and stops so quickly! Except man, all other creatures listen. Life is an opportunity for gaining everlasting peace and joy; it is an opportunity to gather the nectar of life. But we while it away in playing with the sands of time. This our playfulness is costly. The lines we draw on the sands are obliterated by our own feet when we leave the sea-shore. The winds and the others come here and they too draw figures on the canvas of sands."

He looked at the silver orb in the sky and continued, "Where you doodled on the sands just now, many generations before you, have doodled in their times; this sand-writing has been the hobby of mankind for ages. I appeal to you to come out of this playfulness. I beseech you not to waste life, but to live it. If you go on playing, you lose life; if you stop playing and realise your destiny, your life takes a triumphant turn."

As we rose to return home, his words kept ringing in our ears : "Realise your destiny . . . Realise your destiny . . . "

An old man once approached Acharyashri with his dilemma. He said, "I am constantly harassed by thoughts. This was not so till I started meditating. Day and night, all twenty-four hours, I am conscious of disturbed state of my mind; in fact, at times I doubt if I am sane! Please tell me what I should do; show me the cure for my feverish mind."

For a while, Acharyashri was silent, as is his wont. In those silent seconds, sometimes he seems to take a deeper look into the questioner, often he seems to establish an inner rapport with the questioner, before speaking.

Slowly, words came out of him. "This experience has its benefits, because when you feel disturbed by the constant traffic of thoughts, you realise the futility of over-thinking. You are fortunate, because others not in the same category as you, are so dull, they do not feel disturbed by such mental hyperactivity. Your disturbance is a welcome sign; it shows that the trouble can be remedied."

"Normally, so long as you are carried away by your speeding thoughts, you do not feel disturbed by the thoughts. But if you pause in-between, and study your mind, you realise how feverishly it works, and disturbs your peace. This pause is essential for curbing the overactivity of mind. You have to halt and watch your thoughts; for, **if your thoughts are running fast, you can not know your mind.**"

"Therefore, I reiterate, your experience is a good omen. Do not be worried about it; on the contrary, be glad. But then take the next step : take a completely impersonal view of the thought

processes. **Be only an observer of thoughts; have nothing to do with them except to observe them.** When thoughts cloud your mind, and harass you, ask them, 'Oh thoughts ! To whom do you belong? Do you belong to me?' You will get no reply to this inquiry ! Because the thoughts do not belong to you ! Try and find out."

"Thoughts are your guests. They have made a lodging house of your mind. It is wrong to think of them as yours; and this same mistake comes in the way of getting rid of them. If you identify as yours, you stand in the way of their exit. And then the thoughts which are your temporary guests, become permanent lodgers. **By looking at thoughts impersonally, you sever connection with them. Whenever a thought or desire is born in you, watch its birth, see it grow before the mind's eye, and then observe its decline, and the final departure. Repeat this observation with the second thought that enters the mind; watch also its birth, and growth, decline and death. Thus, in a quiet and detached manner — that is, as a witness — observe the constant stream of thoughts. Feel nothing about them, good or bad. Form no opinions about them, favourable or unfavourable. Just watch. Thus, by silent choiceless observation, the traffic of thoughts slows down; and finally, a state of thoughtless bliss is achieved. In this state of 'Samadhi', all thoughts vanish, and yet, paradoxically, the capacity for clear thinking develops.** This capacity is what I call 'pragna'. It is essential to free oneself of all thoughts, to develop this faculty of wisdom."

I was watching that old man, while Acharyashri was elucidating his point. It seemed to me that the old man's tension was now much less; he was serene as he heaved a sigh of relief. Then he asked, "Would you suggest anything else for me?"

"Yes; I would like to give you two pointers. They are important for those who seek truth, or want to realise themselves." And then with a twinkle in his eyes, Acharyashri ended, "One : make a beginning. Two : keep going."

Once somebody asked Acharyashri, "What type of life is lived by a person who is without any kind of desire?"

Acharyashri said, "Outwardly there are no changes. But inwardly all is changed. In a sense, everything remains as before; but in a different sense, nothing remains as before; all is changed."

Then he narrated a story. "The same question was put to a saint by a person like you. The saint asked that person to bring a square piece of cloth, and a match-box. Then he spread the cloth on ground and nailed its four corners. Next he set the cloth afire. This reduced the cloth to ashes; but its fibres and design still remained visible. It could be said of the cloth now, that it was there and yet it was not there. A 'jeevan-mukta's life is also like that. In the fire of knowledge, everything is destroyed; only the frame of ashes remains."

How much are these words of Acharyashri true about his own self! Those who live with him see only the frame of ashes in him. He lives like any ordinary man; there is nothing special in his habits. Yet, it would be difficult to find as unusual a person as he is; for he is not sitting there; though he speaks, it is not

him speaking; and though he eats, he eats nothing. What sort of a person is he? A saint ! ?

We were basking in the mild sun of a winter morning, when some people came to see Acharyashri. In the group was a monk; he asked, "Is there no easy and convenient way to attain the Truth?"

Acharyashri replied, "It is the law of life that we have to pay price of everything. Nothing is free. And the more valuable an object, the more we have to pay for it. The price for knowing the Truth is our own self — yes, nothing less than our own self. **Lose yourself and find the Truth. In other words, you find yourself when you lose yourself.** If you do not lose yourself, you neither gain the Truth, nor yourself. All this may sound complicated, but it can be sorted out by deep contemplation. Haven't you, at times, felt, that whom you consider yourself is not your true self?"

After pausing to allow the question to sink in us, Acharyashri continued : "Now, **if the 'I' we so often refer to in our daily life, were our true self, there was no question of searching for the Truth. Only because that 'I' is not true, there is the thirst for the Truth. Within ourselves, on some conscious or unconscious level, we do have a hazy inkling of the fact that our 'I' is unreal.** This so-called 'I' must cease to be, before we can uncover the Truth lying underneath it. On the outside is the 'I', the ego, the unreal self; inside is the true self. **The true self existing in our innermost being is the Truth, because at that depth, the self extant is universal. He who can go deep within himself**

will reach the same depth in others also. The Truth — call it God — resides in this inner centre. The circumference has to be left behind, if we would move towards the centre of a circle; same is the case here. There is no other way to reach the goal. And the greatest ordeal is this losing of oneself, the losing of the 'I' or the ego. But, ah ! the gain compensates a thousand million times the small loss of 'I'. For, the gain is eternal peace, bliss and consciousness. Coming back to your question, I do not know if I have shown you an easy and convenient way to know the Truth; but easy or not, it is the way. Find out for yourself."

That night some one died in our neighbourhood. We informed Acharyashri about it in the morning, and sought his views on death and dying.

He said, "There is nothing as sure as death. Where there is life, there is bound to be death. He who bears not this fact in mind, wastes life; whereas he who knows this truth, obtains that which is immortal."

After being quiet for a while, Acharyashri elaborated his point; "I do not feel depressed at anybody's death, because there is no need to feel anything about it. However, it is a matter of sorrow, no doubt, if I see a life wasted. We have not to grieve over a dead body, but over a wasted life."

Then he told us a parable. "You know, King Janak was called 'videh', i.e., without or beyond the body. Once, a young minister of his asked him, 'Your Excellency ! How can you be considered without a body, when you do have a physical body?' The king smiled but said nothing. After a few days, however, the king invited the minister for lunch. Such an invitation from

the king himself was a great honour; naturally, therefore, the minister was overjoyed. But the next day, on his way to the palace for lunch, the minister's joy completely evaporated, when he heard in the market, the town-crier's announcement that the same evening, the minister was to be executed for some political faux pas! What a calamity! What a tragedy! In the afternoon the king honoured him by inviting to lunch; and in the evening ordered his execution ! !"

"Any way, despite his confusion and anguish, he somehow reached the palace. Now, the king had purposely got the dishes prepared without salt! He sat down to lunch with the minister and fed him with all affection. The minister somehow ate the food, finished the lunch; but all absent-mindedly, for, with every minute that passed, he was coming closer to death! After the lunch, the king asked, 'My man! Was there anything lacking in the meal you had?' As though coming out of unconsciousness or sleep, the young minister said, 'Sorry, Your Excellency! You fed me well, but I have no recollection of the taste of various dishes. The thought of dying this evening has deprived me of all other thoughts. Please excuse my absentmindedness.' King Janak laughed on hearing the minister's reply, and said, 'This was in answer to your question of a few days ago. Do not worry; you are not going to die today. I had planned this strategy to make you confront death. He who sees death close-by, becomes body-less despite having a body. And he who, by practice, loses awareness of the body, is not aware of death either. In such a state of consciousness, the individual attains that which is immortal."

As we were returning from our morning walk, someone asked Acharyashri to explain our thinking mechanism.

"First of all, let me tell you that most of us do not know how to think," Acharyashri said. "Possibly the most subtle science is the science of thinking, and we have to know about this science. **We have to learn to think. At the outset, bear in mind the difference between accumulating thoughts, and developing the faculty of thinking.** The notion is that collection of thoughts and the ability to think are one and the same. But accumulation of anything is not real gain; accumulation is only the means of hiding one's lack, and thereby deceiving oneself. And self-deception is self-destruction. This self-deception is universal; and because of it, though there is phenomenal world-wide increase in the number of ideas, there is, at the same time, marked decrease in the ability to think. Seldom do we come across an independent thinker."

I interrupted to ask, "But what about our universities? Don't they teach us to think?"

Acharyashri said, "No! They teach us only to learn by rote what others have thought; they do not teach us to think for ourselves. They teach us to memorise."

Then, continuing from where he had been interrupted, he said, **"When thoughts rise from within, you gain knowledge.** And thoughts can rise from within in all of us. This thinking power which lies dormant in us all, can be invoked and arisen if we have the know-how of it. The first thing necessary for this awakening, is that we should stop filling the mind with others' thoughts. **It is a pity that we are so full of thoughts all the time, yet seldom think!** Yes, it is true that we seldom think! Most of us are not even aware of our ability to think. After all, we can be aware only

of those of our capabilities of which we make some use. The capabilities can become realities by utilising them; it is not surprising if the inactive capabilities are forgotten and lost. In most of us, the ability to think is also that type of an inactive, unused faculty. Usually, we react like automatic machines; we do not think. The external stimuli make us move like a machine; we do not pause to think."

After letting us pause to think, he continued, "If you doubt my words, **study yourself all day long. You find no time-gap between the external stimuli that strike your consciousness, and your reaction to the same. Is there any pause for thought between somebody insulting you, and your becoming angry? No; there is no time-gap, and therefore no thought-gap. This is because there is no place for 'thinking' in your life.** My meaning of 'thinking' is : every reaction should be with awareness. **Reaction without awareness is a thoughtless action; therefore, react with awareness.** Reaction with awareness is an indication of the active thinking faculty of an individual. Before reacting to any external stimulus, the thinking individual will think about his action, will think out what his reaction should be, and why it should be that particular reaction and none other. He will be awake to the movements of his mind; he will be conscious about his actions. There will be full awareness about all his doings. He will not be a tool in the hands of external stimuli. He will not do anything unconsciously. In short, that individual will be an individual in true sense of the term. For, he who acts unawares, is not an individual (in=not; dividuus=divisible); he is not whole, or complete."

In conclusion, Acharyashri said, "Where there is no discriminatory thinking, there is no existence of that faculty which introduces one to oneself, and which frees one from mechanical, automatic or unconscious actions."

We had encamped in a small village. Many people had come to meet Acharyashri, bringing with them their diverse doubts and problems; underlying all their doubts was their thirst for knowledge; they wanted to know the meaning of life. They were finding worthless their type of existence.

Acharyashri told them, **"You get out of life what you put into it. There is no meaning to life, unless we make it meaningful.** He who merely wishes to make life worthwhile, without doing anything positive about it, will not succeed. The worthwhileness of life is the result of creative activity, and not indolent passivity."

In the group of visitors was a sculptor. He interrupted to inquire, "I sculpt idols; I am a creative artist, yet I do not get any deep satisfaction out of my life-work. What shall I do?"

Looking to him with penetrating eyes, Acharyashri said. **"Production is not creation. True creation is that which recreatess you. To transform stones into idols is much easier than transforming oneself into a divine image. Harder and tougher than stones is personality of ours which we have to chisel out; no stone is that difficult to work on. True creativity lies in giving shape to this petrified self of ours; satisfaction lies only therein; lasting joy flows only thereof.** You asked me, 'What shall I do?'

I suggest now you begin work on the stone that is your own self and create your new form. Leave aside the usual sculpting; you made enough statues so far in life."

"A poet pours beauty in his words; a painter gives life to a dead piece of canvas; a sculptor breathes life in stones and wood; but the greatest art is life itself, and the greatest artist is he who brings to his own life, beauty as well as creativity."

That night, as we were about to depart from a village, many villagers came to see us off; one of them was a young man. He said, "I am very unhappy and worried; but I can not pin-point the reason of my misery. I am sick and tired of my circumstances, and want to change them; perhaps in a new environment, I may get some peace."

Acharyashri looked at him with a genial smile and said, "Happiness and unhappiness are not dependent on external circumstances. **There is neither happiness nor unhappiness in things external; our glad or sad states depend upon our reaction to these external things. Actually, things do not matter; what matters is our view of things;** all depends upon how we look at things. Therefore, in final analysis, the importance is of the individual, and not of the object; the importance is of yourself, and not the object you possess. Hence, so to say, happiness or unhappiness reside within us. Epictectus has said: 'If you are unhappy, know for sure that you yourself are the cause of it.' I would say the same thing. We are the cause of our misery, because whatever we are, we have made ourselves such. Please bear in mind this truth, because you cannot transform your life without it. If you feel unhappy, know that something is wrong with your viewpoint. **A miserable life**

is the result of a wrong way of looking at things; and a happy life is the result of a right approach to life. If the mental attitude does not change with your proposed change in circumstances, you may not feel any more happy than at present. Please try to search for the cause of your unhappiness within yourself, not without, whenever you feel miserable. And then, gradually, you will discover the causes of your unhappiness, hidden in your own reactions; then a new life will start for you. **He who seeks for faults outside, goes astray; he who sees for them in himself, is sure to succeed in transcending them."**

It was a full-moon night; we were sitting on sands on the river bank. Breaking his quiet, Acharyashri, on his own, spoke to us from time to time. Surprisingly, his words did much to dispel our unexpressed doubts. Not only that, it seemed to us that he knew even about our unconscious doubts!

He said, "I see in the world today a decline in thinking. By thinking, I do not mean thoughts; for thoughts are aplenty. There is a flood of thoughts, as it were; but what I call 'thinking' tends to be drowned in this flood. We have to save 'thinking' from this flood."

One of us asked, "What do you mean by 'thinking'?"

Acharyashri replied : **"By 'thinking' I mean discretion; the ability to distinguish between the ephemeral and the eternal, between the mortal and the immortal, between the unreal and the real.** He who has lost this type of ability to think, wastes his life on the transitory; whereas, he who is able to think, seeks for the permanent and not the illusory.

After all, what is transient has no real existence; only that which is permanent really exists. Life belongs to that which is eternal; death to that which is ephemeral."

"The non-thinking masses run after dreams; and sleep is the necessary pre-requisite for dreams. That is why the thoughtless seek all types of sleep alias unconsciousness. In other words, the search for sleep is a symptom of the thoughtless being. The 'thinking' being inquires about the Truth; and for inquiry, it is necessary to stop sleeping, and to be wide awake. **The 'thinking' person is all for consciousness, and all against unawareness. The wide-awake life is symbolic of 'thinking'. 'Thinking' means awareness."**

Then Acharyashri narrated a story. "Once, when Siddharth was coming out of the house of Gautami, she said, 'O Siddharth ! Blessed is the mother who has a son like you; blessed is the father whose image you are; blessed is the wife who chose you her husband.' Like that she blessed a number of persons. Siddharth did not say anything; but he thought to himself : 'This blessedness is transitory; is there any blessing which is permanent? Is there no way whereby one can be permanently blessed? — and be for ever tranquil and in eternal bliss? For, **that which is here today, and gone tomorrow, is really speaking, not here even today.'**

"This is what I call 'thinking', true thinking, deep — as opposed to superficial — thinking. In Siddharth's mind flashed the right thought; and he realised that so long as there was desire or craving for anything, there was no peace of mind. **So long as the fires of desire burnt hot inside, the cool serenity**

of Truth could not be experienced. Such Thinking opens the door for the awakened consciousness to move forward to its goal."

"A new resolution crystallised in Siddharth's mind; it was : 'I shall extinguish the fires of desire, and know that which is the Truth. Getting out from any slumber of momentary existence, I shall realise that which is eternal.' Thus 'thinking', he removed a valuable necklace from round his neck and gave it to Gautami as a Guru-dakshina. Such **'thinking' leads to turning-points in life — even to revolutionary changes in life.** Now search within yourself; do you really think?"

Once Acharyashri visited a jail, and talked to its inmates.

He said, "Brethren! Do not be under the delusion that you alone are in fetters; those outside this prison, who are apparently free, are also in chains, though their shackles are of a different kind. Their desires are their chains; their ignorance is their imprisonment. Man's bondage is of man's own making. Man himself labours at making the walls and bars for his prison. Though what I say may surprise you, the truth is that most of us spend our lives creating prison-houses for ourselves."

"Thinking from another angle about this, I would say, lack of religion means lack of freedom. Most of us do not live in religion means lack of freedom. Most of us do not live in religion, but in the lack of it; of course, we are not conscious of this fact. Those that do not travel in the direction of self-enlightenment, gradually go deeper and deeper in the abyss of darkness, and this darkness can be destructive."

"He who has no thirst for the Truth can not be free. Truth leads to freedom; nay, more correctly, Truth is freedom. And please remember that he who is not free is not for, but against, God. In the soil of consciousness that is not free, the plants of divinity can not grow. For these plants to grow, to bloom and to bear fruits, the soil needed is of freedom; the manure needed is of a simple, unpretentious life, the water needed is of purity; and the seed required is of living silence. But above all, there should be the care of the gardener by the name of Awareness."

"He who shows the courage to fulfil the above conditions, finds himself free of all bondage. From within his self, the latent fire of God burns bright, because the ashes of dependence have been blown away. And in that fire, misery and dissatisfaction, pain and turmoil, all are burnt out completely. The ashes left thereafter, act as a fertiliser for the blossoming of flowers of ever-lasting joy and bliss."

"I invite you to participate in a wonderful search. The moment your heart echoes this invitation of mine, you will be transformed into a new being who hears the call divine; then you won't heed any call from lesser or baser sources. The calls from the low are heard only so long as the call from the high is disregarded. The call from the high or from the above, is a challenging call! The ways of the beast exist only because the sight is not turned towards God. **Only they are tied to the mundane and the terrestrial, who do not dream of soaring to celestial heights. Raise your sights to the firmament, and see how vast, how immense and limitless is the sky; and also how near it is to you! Isn't it height of folly — sort of insult to your intelligence — that you remain earth-**

bound worms crawling in muck, despite your having the wings to fly to the most distant horizons, and the spirit that can encompass the sky?"

"This spirit is mysterious; it can be as small or as large as it chooses to be. It can be smaller than the tiniest atom, and more immense than the skies. It can be a dog, and it can be also a god; it is its own creation. Therefore, those who concentrate on the lowly, become lowly. Whereas, those who yearn to soar in the infinite realms, become the Infinite."

"I appeal to you: If you would fall in love, let it be with God! And if you must be in bonds, let the bonds be of the limitless firmament! And if you must be in a prison-house, let nothing less than cosmos be your jail! And if you must confine yourself to any limits, let these be the frontiers of freedom! And if you must seek manacles, then seek the ties of love, because love means freedom absolute!"